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FROM THE U.S. MISSION TO THE UN AGENCIES IN ROME

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA: FAO UPDATE ON TURKEY AND THE
CAUCASUS

REF: (A) 05 ROME 3949; (B) 05 ROME 3320; (C) 05 ROME 2979;
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1. (SBU) SUMMARY. ON JANUARY 13, USMISSION UN ROME STAFF MET WITH JOSEPH DOMENECH, FAO CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER, AND MEMBERS OF HIS STAFF TO DISCUSS THE CURRENT SITUATION IN TURKEY AND NEEDS THERE. ALSO DISCUSSED WAS THE OUTLOOK FOR ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA. FOR TURKEY, DOMENECH STATED THAT THE DISEASE IS STILL SPREADING AMONG BIRDS; ALTHOUGH A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT STRAIN, IT APPEARS IT ARRIVED AT THE SAME TIME AS WHEN THE VIRUS HIT CRIMEA, UKRAINE; OPERATIONS ARE NOW RECEIVING HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL SUPPORT, WHICH WILL HELP STOP THE SPREAD TO A CERTAIN EXTENT THROUGH THE IMPROVEMENT OF SURVEILLANCE AND REPORTING ACTIVITIES; AND THE COUNTRY FACES A GAP IN TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND VEHICLES. TWO FAO EXPERTS WILL DEPART ON AN ASSESSMENT MISSION TO ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA SHORTLY, BUT FAO NOTES THAT ARMENIA'S LABORATORY FACILITIES ARE DEFICIENT, ALTHOUGH THE COUNTRY IS EMBARKING ON A VACCINATION PROGRAM UTILIZING RUSSIAN-MANUFACTURED VACCINES; AZERBAIJAN IS BETTER PLACED WITH SEROLOGICAL TESTING BUT LACKS A FACILITY FOR FRONTLINE DIAGNOSTICS, WHILE GEORGIA HAS A SOPHISTICATED FACILITY. END SUMMARY

TURKEY

2. (SBU) DOMENECH STATED THAT FAO'S OBJECTIVE IS TO MAINTAIN ASSISTANCE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF TURKEY (GOT) AND TO GATHER AND DISSEMINATE INFORMATION ON THE OUTBREAK NOW THAT PROJECTS ARE UNDERWAY TO IMPROVE SURVEILLANCE. HE STATED THAT THE DISEASE IS STILL SPREADING AND THE BELIEF WAS THAT IT HAD BEEN SPREADING FOR SEVERAL WEEKS, MOST LIKELY APPEARING IN TURKEY AT THE SAME TIME AS IN CRIMEA, UKRAINE, ALTHOUGH THE TWO STRAINS DIFFER SLIGHTLY. THE FACT THAT THE GOT WAS UNDERREPORTING AND SLOW TO ACT ALLOWED THE VIRUS TO SPREAD WIDELY, ACCORDING TO DOMENECH. NOW THAT THERE IS HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL SUPPORT WITHIN THE GOT, HE IS OPTIMISTIC ON ERADICATING OR CONTROLLING MULTIPLE OUTBREAKS. VACCINATION OF DOMESTICATED POULTRY IS BEING CONSIDERED AS A FIRST STEP. HOWEVER, ALL THE OUTBREAKS IN UKRAINE, RUSSIAN ROMANIA AND NOW TURKEY LEAD FAO TO BELIEVE THAT THE INFESTATION COULD BE CONSIDERED A PLAGUE, EVEN IF THERE IS A GOOD ECONOMIC RESPONSE AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO DETER IT.

3. (U) DOMENECH INDICATED MANY ASSESSMENTS WERE ONGOING IN TURKEY PRIOR TO THE REPORTED OUTBREAK THERE, WHICH NOW HAS CATAPULTED THIS RESEARCH FORWARD. FOR EXAMPLE, BOTH THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, WHICH WAS PREPARING TO LAUNCH A PROJECT TO IMPROVE VETERINARY SERVICES/AVIAN INFLUENZA ACTIVITIES IN TURKEY IN 2007, AND THE WORLD BANK, WHICH WAS WORKING ON A LOAN AGREEMENT FOR SAME, ARE FAST-TRACKING THESE PROJECTS. (NOTE: DOMENECH SAID THAT THE EC WAS DECIDING ON A EURO 5 MILLION PROPOSAL THAT AFTERNOON [JANUARY 13].) DOMENECH WARNED OF THE NEED TO ENSURE THERE IS NO DUPLICATION OF EFFORT OR OVERLAP, AND TO ENSURE THAT THE GOT IS PROPERLY RESOURCED TO CARRY OUT THE REQUIRED KILLING OR CULLING OF AN ESTIMATED 5 MILLION BIRDS.

4. (SBU) DOMENECH STATED THAT TURKEY FACES A GAP IN TECHNICAL EXPERTISE, WHICH IS WHY FAO HAS SENT EXPERTS THERE FOR THREE WEEKS UNDER THE FAO/OIE UMBRELLA TO SUPPORT

ANKARA'S NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF TURKEY'S 81 REGIONS. THERE IS A GREAT SHORTAGE OF PEOPLE TO CONDUCT SURVEILLANCE IN REMOTE REGIONS. HE QUIETLY MENTIONED THE SENSITIVITIES RELATED TO THE USE OF THE TURKISH ARMY TO CONDUCT ACTIVITIES IN LARGELY KURDISH AREAS. WE CAN TAKE OUT). WHEN ASKED HOW DONORS COULD HELP TURKEY, DOMENECH STATED THAT MANY DONORS DO NOT TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE NEED FOR VEHICLES TO SERVICE TURKEY'S VAST RURAL COMMUNITIES. IN HIS VIEW, DONORS FOCUS TOO MUCH ON THE DIAGNOSTICS AND PERSONAL PROTECTION EQUIPMENT (PPE). HE STATED THAT THE GOT KNOWS WHAT IT IS DOING IN ITS EFFORTS TO COMBAT OTHER ANIMAL DISEASES (E.G., RINDERPEST), ALTHOUGH AVIAN INFLUENZA IS A VERY DIFFERENT DISEASE. MANY DONORS ALSO HAVE QUESTIONED WHETHER THE GOT NEEDS EXTERNAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THESE ACTIVITIES, NOTING THAT THE COUNTRY IS WEALTHY ENOUGH TO HANDLE THE OUTBREAK. DOMENECH BELIEVES THAT THERE IS A NEED TO COMPLEMENT NATIONAL LAB FACILITIES AND COMMUNICATIONS.

ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, AND GEORGIA

15. (U) BECAUSE OF ARMENIA'S COMMON BORDER WITH TURKEY, DOMENECH STATED THAT FAO DECIDED JANUARY 12 TO SEND A TWO-MEMBER ASSESSMENT TEAM NEXT WEEK TO REVIEW THE SITUATION IN ARMENIA, FOCUSING MAINLY ON THE RISK AT THE BORDER WHERE THE FIRST HUMAN CASES IN TURKEY WERE REPORTED. THE WORLD BANK HAD ALSO ASKED FAO INFORMALLY TO IDENTIFY A LABORATORY EXPERT WHO COULD BE SENT TO ARMENIA TO HELP WITH DIAGNOSTICS. DOMENECH'S STAFF SPOKE AT THE DECEMBER WORKSHOP FAO HOSTED IN YEREVAN TO REWRITE CONTINGENCY PLANS TO INCLUDE AVIAN INFLUENZA SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL ACTIVITIES. NEXT WEEK'S MISSION WILL DETERMINE THE STATUS OF AND PROGRESS MADE ON THE CONTINGENCY PLANS AND WHETHER ARMENIA HAS INCORPORATED ANY AVIAN INFLUENZA PREPARATIONS. FAO INDICATED THAT IT HAD BEEN IN COMMUNICATION IN OCTOBER 2005 WITH USAID/YEREVAN ON A \$3 MILLION PROPOSAL TO STRENGTHEN SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL OF MAJOR TRANS-BOUNDARY ANIMAL DISEASES THROUGH UPGRADING DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES, BUT HAD NOT YET RECEIVED A RESPONSE (NOTE: USMISSION UN ROME HAS RECEIVED AND FORWARDED AN ELECTRONIC COPY OF THE PROPOSAL TO USAID/W FOR UPDATE. END NOTE.) THE MAJOR ISSUE FOR ARMENIA IS WHETHER AND HOW TO COMPENSATE FARMERS FOR CULLING. FAO STATED THAT ARMENIA'S FINANCIAL RESOURCES ARE LACKING TO COMPENSATE APPROPRIATELY AND THUS THE GOVERNMENT HAS DECIDED TO VACCINATE USING RUSSIAN-MANUFACTURED VACCINES.

16. (SBU) DOMENECH AND HIS STAFF BELIEVE BOTH AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA ARE BETTER PLACED THAN ARMENIA [NOTING THAT FOR GEORGIA, THERE ARE OTHER CONSIDERATIONS IN PLAY HERE, REFERRING TO THE VERY SENSITIVE STATE-DEPARTMENT SPONSORED THREAT AGENT RESPONSE AND DETECTION (TARD) PROJECT, WHICH THE GOVERNMENT IS RELUCTANT TO USE AS A REGIONAL FACILITY]. FOR EXAMPLE, AZERBAIJAN IS CAPABLE OF CONDUCTING SEROLOGICAL TESTING OF THE VIRUS, HOWEVER, IT IS LACKING A FACILITY FOR FRONTLINE DIAGNOSTICS AND DOES NOT HAVE THE FIELD INFRASTRUCTURE TO INVESTIGATE OUTBREAK REPORTS WELL. GEORGIA, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS A SOPHISTICATED DIAGNOSTIC FACILITY AS A RESULT OF TARD. DOMENECH STATED FAO WILL NEED TO KEEP PRESSURE ON THE AZERBAIJANIS IN ORDER TO KEEP THEM PREPARED. TWO MONTHS AGO, AN AZERBAIJAN CONTINGENCY PLAN WAS ALSO PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY USAID/BAKU (NOTE: USMISSION UN ROME REQUESTS A STATUS UPDATE TO INFORM FAO. END NOTE.) IN AZERBAIJAN, THE WORLD BANK IS FINANCING A PROJECT WITH A STRONG FIELD VETERINARY COMPONENT THAT COULD BE USED TO EXPAND GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE ACTIVITIES. FAO BELIEVES IT WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE A QUALITY CONTROL REVIEW OF THE AZERBAIJAN GOVERNMENT'S CONTINGENCY PLAN AND HELP RATCHET UP SURVEILLANCE ACTIVITIES WITH WORLD BANK SUPPORT. FAO ALSO NOTED THAT TARD HAS PLANS TO WORK WITH AZERBAIJAN, BUT NOT BEFORE 2007. IN ANY CASE, DOMENECH STRESSED THAT FAO AND OTHERS NEED TO ENSURE THAT SUSPECTED OUTBREAKS ARE FOLLOWED UP ON PROMPTLY AND REPORTED ACCORDINGLY.

17. (U) FAO ALSO HAS PLANS TO ESTABLISH BY MARCH 2006 A REGIONAL FAO/OIE OFFICE IN TBILISI, GEORGIA, TO COVER GEORGIA, AZERBAIJAN, AND ARMENIA, COMPLEMENTING THE FAO PERSON ALREADY BASED IN TEHERAN. A VETERINARY OFFICER WILL BE PLACED IN TBILISI AND WILL HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL ANIMAL DISEASES, NOT JUST AVIAN INFLUENZA BUT FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE (FMD) AS WELL. BECAUSE THE OFFICER WILL BE UNDER THE FAO/OIE FLAG, THIS INDIVIDUAL WILL ALSO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING CROSS-BORDER VISITS TO TURKEY. FAO HAS ASKED FOR U.S. ASSISTANCE IN LOCATING AN ADDITIONAL EXPERT WITH RUSSIAN LANGUAGE AND EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SKILLS TO ASSIGN TO TBILISI FOR ONE YEAR.

18. (U) USMISSION UN ROME WILL CONTINUE TO COVER AND WIDELY DISSEMINATE INFORMATION ON FAO ACTIVITIES TO COMBAT AND CONTROL AVIAN INFLUENZA.

HALL